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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the use of lexical certainty modifiers, which have a mitigating or emphasizing function (e.g., "I suppose," "sort of," "obviously"). Although certainty modifiers add little to the referential information of messages, they can be very important interpersonally, particularly in terms of politeness. Analysis focused on the use of certainty modifiers by advanced level non-native (Finnish) speakers (NNSs) of English in comparison with that of native (British) speakers and those in conversations in Finnish. NNSs were university-level students. Data were drawn from 12 recorded informal conversations, 4 for each conversation type: among NNSs; among native English speakers; and among native Finnish speakers. Three types of certainty modifiers (hedges, emphatics, implicit modifiers) were distinguished and their distribution in the three conversation types was examined. Results indicate that although the NNSs were otherwise proficient English speakers, they were largely unaware of the significance of certainty modifiers, with the result that their conversation seems more detached, more matter-of-fact, and less involved with each other and with the topic at hand than the native speakers of either English or Finnish. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

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The Use of Lexical Certainty Modifiers by Non-Native (Finnish) and Native Speakers of English

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This paper investigates the use of lexical certainty modifiers. The term refers to expressions with either a mitigating or an emphasizing function, for example *I suppose*, *sort of*, *obviously*, and *very*. Although certainty modifiers add little to the referential information of messages, they can be quite important interpersonally, particularly in terms of linguistic politeness. Knowing how and when to modify one's messages is one part of pragmatic competence; even fluent foreign language speakers may fail to use modifiers where it would be appropriate. This can at its worst result in unfavourable judgments of the speakers; they may be regarded as intentionally impolite or offensive, for example.

The paper focuses on the use of certainty modifiers by fluent non-native (Finnish) speakers of English. Their conversations will be compared with native (British) speakers of English and with their own conversations in Finnish. The purpose is to describe how much the way non-native speakers use certainty modifiers differs from native speaker performance, and whether the differences are as great as to possibly affect successful communication in English. The effect of the learners' L1 on the way they use modifiers in English will also be dealt with.

MODIFICATION: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In most everyday encounters, speakers are constantly modifying what they are saying rather than delivering categorical assertions. This paper focuses on one aspect of modification: the way speakers either mitigate or emphasize the force of their messages. Such modifications do not actually add anything to the

propositional content of utterances, but they can have quite important interpersonal functions. For example, speakers may wish to attenuate threats to face, which communication often entails, by expressing face-threatening acts in a mitigated form (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1978). Conversely, emphasizing can in certain contexts convey that the speaker is interested in the co-participants or in the topic at hand.[1]

There are various ways in which speakers can mitigate or emphasize their speech, ranging from facial expressions and other nonverbal means to complex linguistic constructions. This paper focuses on the use of lexical modifiers, which play a crucial role in verbal modification. The term lexical is used here in opposition to, for example, prosodic modification strategies or syntactic choices, such as passivization or impersonalization which also can have modifying functions. Mitigating devices include, for example, expressions like *I suppose*, *perhaps*, or *sort of*. *Certainly*, *I'm positive* and *very* are examples of devices that have an emphasizing function. *Certainty modifier* will be used as a cover term for both mitigating and emphasizing expressions.

Mitigating and emphasizing form a part of pragmatic competence, affecting how appropriate, rather than how grammatically correct, speakers are in a given situation. The use of modifiers is in close connection to the interpersonal function of language (see Halliday, 1973) in that modifiers can reflect something about the speakers' evaluations of what they are saying, and about their attitudes towards the co-participants and towards the situation as a whole. More particularly, they often play a salient role in linguistic politeness.

Native speakers of any language are usually pragmatically competent: they know, to a great extent subconsciously, when and how to mitigate and emphasize what they are saying. But the situation is more complicated for those who speak a foreign language. Non-native speakers easily concentrate only on the content of their messages, without paying attention to the interpersonal aspects of what they are saying. One probable reason for this is the fact that up till now, pragmatic aspects of language have not received very much attention in language teaching and non-native speakers are thus easily unaware of their importance. This may lead to pragmatic failure (see Thomas, 1983). For example, foreign language speakers may fail to use mitigating certainty modifiers in contexts where native speakers would expect them to occur. Such pragmatic failures are not necessarily seen as language problems. Rather, they may reflect unfavourably on non-native speakers, especially if the speakers are fluent as far as the surface correctness of language is concerned: they may be judged as intentionally rude or standoffish rather than having linguistic problems.

THE DATA

This paper is concerned with the use of lexical certainty modifiers by Finnish speakers of English. The focus of interest is on how much the way they use certainty modifiers differs from the native speaker use, and whether the differences might be as great as to potentially affect successful communication in English. The question of how much the learners' L1 affects the way they use modifiers in English will also be dealt with.

The data on which the findings are based consists of three kinds of recorded and transcribed conversations: by Finnish speakers of English, by native speakers of English, and by native speakers of Finnish. These situations can best be described as informal conversations between acquaintances. The main focus is on conversations by Finnish speakers of English (abbreviated as NNS conversations from now on). The participants in these conversations are students of English at the university level and thus quite fluent speakers as far as the mastery of grammar and vocabulary are concerned. There are four conversations altogether, with three to four participants in each; the total number of non-native speakers is fourteen. The duration of each conversation is approximately 30 minutes. The discussants were given a general topic with which to start the conversation, but in order to attain as natural conversations as possible the participants were encouraged to change the topic whenever they would feel like it. Note that there are no native speakers present in these conversations. This may have some effect on the non-native speakers' linguistic behaviour, but given that the use of modifiers apparently remains to a large extent outside speakers' conscious awareness (see e.g., Faerch and Kasper, 1989, p. 243), it is quite likely that the non-native speakers would use lexical modifiers in much the same way also in authentic encounters with native speakers of English.

The data also contains four 30-minute conversations by native (British) speakers of English (NS(E) conversations). The participants are university students of linguistics, of roughly the same age as the Finnish speakers of English. There are thirteen speakers altogether, in groups of three or four. These groups were similarly given a general topic at the beginning of the recordings with the information that the participants are free to change the topic during the conversations. As in the case of the NNS conversations, the situations were not otherwise controlled.

The third set of conversations is in Finnish (NS(F) conversations), by the same speakers and by exactly the same groups whose conversations in English constitute the non-native data. This means that there are also four conversations in Finnish; these conversations last about 30 minutes as well. The Finnish

conversations were in each case recorded after the students' conversations in English. Table 1 illustrates the data.

As the table indicates, there are comparable sets of IL (interlanguage), L1 and L2 data (L2 from the Finnish speakers' point of view). In other words, non-native speakers' performance is compared not only with native speakers of the target language but also with their native language. As Kasper and Dahl (1991, p. 225) point out, this is more informative than comparing only non-native and native speakers with each other.

TABLE 1
Illustration of the data

Conversations	NNS	NS(F)	NS(E)
Speakers	14 Finnish speakers of English	14 native speakers of Finnish	13 native speakers of English
	The same speakers in both groups		
Type of data	IL	L1	L2

CERTAINTY MODIFIERS

Mitigating and emphasizing expressions are called certainty modifiers because they can be interpreted as reflecting degrees of certainty. Moreover, it is possible to distinguish between two kinds of certainty. On the one hand, modifiers signal degrees of propositional certainty. That is, speakers indicate by the use of modifiers the extent to which they are committed to the truth of the proposition. For example, *I suppose* signals lack of full commitment while *certainly* indicates full commitment.[2] On the other hand, certainty modifiers are also capable of signalling degrees of interactional certainty. This has to do with how confidently speakers want to put their views across, whether they want to remain vague and fuzzy or to be explicit about what they are saying. For example, the use of *sort of* can reflect vagueness, and the use of *especially* explicitness.

No attempt will be made, however, to distinguish between different kinds of certainty modifiers on the grounds of whether they reflect propositional certainty or interactional certainty. This is because certainty modifiers are usually

ambiguous and multifunctional in that they can be interpreted in both ways. For example, it is often impossible to say whether speakers modify their message with *probably* because they are not fully committed to the truth of what they are saying or because they choose to remain vague for interpersonal reasons.

Certainty modifiers will be divided into three subcategories. *Hedges* have a mitigating function; the group contains expressions like *I suppose*, *apparently*, *sort of* in English, and *ehkä* 'maybe', *varmaan* 'probably', *vähän* 'a bit' in Finnish.[3] The function of *emphatics* is to boost or aggravate speaker's messages; they include, for example, expressions like *sure*, *obviously*, *very* in English, and *varmasti* 'certainly', and *tosi* 'really' in Finnish. The third category is called *implicit modifiers*. Implicitness refers to the fact that unlike with hedges and emphatics, it is difficult to tell the meaning of implicit modifiers from their surface form alone. Their meaning becomes evident only in the context, and it remains often ambiguous even then. Speakers can exploit this ambiguity and multifunctionality because it leaves room for meaning negotiations. The core members of this category are the expressions *I mean*, *you know*, *well* and *like*, which have also been called pragmatic particles or discourse markers (see Östman, 1981; Schiffrin, 1987). When comparing, for example, *I assume* and *I mean*, the function of the former can be inferred from its semantic content, whereas *I mean* is implicit in that the function in which it is used is rarely in close connection to the meaning of the verb 'to mean'. Rather, it is used in a particle-like fashion, and whether it functions as a downtoning or as an aggravating device depends on its context of occurrence. There are similar particle-like expressions in Finnish, the most frequently occurring ones in the present data being *niinku(n)* and *sillee(n)* (the rough meaning equivalents in English are 'as it were' and 'such a/in such way,' respectively).

FINDINGS EMERGING FROM THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Table 2 shows the number of hedges, emphatics, and implicit modifiers in the three sets of conversations and their relative distribution.

TABLE 2

The distribution of hedges, emphatics and implicit modifiers

	NNS		NS(E)		NS(F)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
HEDGES	301	58	705	46	501	51
EMPHATICS	94	18	255	16	154	16
IMPLICIT MODIFIERS	127	24	587	38	320	33
Total	522	100	1547	100	975	100

As the table shows there is a clear difference in the use of certainty modifiers between the non-native and the native speakers of English as far as the number of modifiers is concerned, in that the non-native speakers, quite expectedly, use them much less. The total number of certainty modifiers is 1,547 in the NS(E) conversations and 522 in the NNS conversations. The difference seems at first quite striking, but it has to be borne in mind that during the same amount of time, the number of words produced by the native speakers is much bigger than by the non-native speakers. But even after relating the number of certainty modifiers to the total number of words the difference is clear: certainty modifiers constitute 13% of all the words spoken in the NS(E) conversations, in the NNS conversations the corresponding figure is 8%. The non-native speakers thus resort to modifying devices more sparingly, which supports the assumption that mastering pragmatic aspects of a foreign language is indeed difficult even for fluent non-native speakers. In the native speaker data especially, expressions of personal opinions and interpretations are heavily modalized, and complex combinations of modifiers are also quite frequent. The non-native speakers are more likely to use only a couple of modifiers in an utterance, and quite often long stretches of talk go totally unmodified. Compare the following examples:

(1) NNS

S2 you have to let your mind rest to, in order to learn at all
S1 mm it's true (pause) *I don't know I think* that the studyweeks shouldn't be so restricted
S2 *I think* it's funny to study on loans in general
S1 yeah [*really* funny
S2 it's in] students are only group of people who study who live on loans
S1 mm
S3 these old people complained about their pensions two weeks ago in Helsinki and, they demanded that they should have at least three thousand marks per month to (-) and think about students
S1 yeah
S2 you have less than a thousand mark for free and loan
S1 *I think* that the students should have a free er free money
S2 yeah...

(2) NS(E)

S3 mm and if we think about *I mean* the students take advantage of the community as much if no more than anybody else *you know* we're not *like* exempt [from the rest of all we *just* pay for it
S2 yeah *I suppose* so but *I still think*] you could once you've finished studying *or whatever* you're still gonna *you know* you're gonna have to pay the full whack then and *I think* you're gonna make up for then *I just think* they shouldn't make students pay *I mean* I *kind of* agree- I can see the point of a poll tax in general *and everything* even though I don't agree with it cos *I think* the better off you are you should pay more *and everything*

Example (2) above shows that the native speakers usually modalize their views with hedges and implicit modifiers which have typically a downtoning function. The role of emphatics is much smaller, which suggests that mitigating is interpersonally more important in these conversations (emphatics will be discussed in more detail later in the paper). When considering the interpersonal function of such downtoning devices, they can quite often be interpreted as markers of negative politeness: Speakers do not want to impose their views on others because it can be perceived as a threat towards their negative face, and therefore they rather put their views across tentatively. But speakers may also choose to express

themselves in a vague and fuzzy way because they want to protect their own face from the reactions of others. This shows that it is difficult to determine whether certainty modifiers are directed more towards the speaker's own face or towards the face of others. As Goffman (1967, p. 6) puts it, one's own face and the face of others are indeed "constructs of the same order."

In comparison to the native speakers of English, the non-native speakers' contributions are more direct. Directness may in certain contexts be interpreted as bluntness, as a threat towards the addressee's negative face. Such an interpretation, obviously, depends on the context but it seems, on the basis of the present data, that at least sensitive topics on which there are likely to be differing opinions among speakers, and expressions of personal opinions require some level of indirectness. Even if the non-native speakers were not necessarily regarded as impolite because they are more direct, the small amount of modifying material makes their expressions seem more matter-of-fact than those of the native speakers, and they may therefore be perceived as too formal for the context of informal face-to-face conversation.

The fact that the learners use certainty modifiers so scarcely seems to be an interlanguage phenomenon rather than resulting from L1 influence, judging from the fact that when the same speakers use Finnish, they also make abundant use of lexical certainty modifiers. There are 975 certainty modifiers in the four NS(F) conversations. These constitute over 10% of all words, but it is difficult to compare this figure with the proportional amount of certainty modifiers in the conversations in English because English and Finnish are structurally very different languages. Due to its agglutinative nature, one word in Finnish may express a meaning that needs to be expressed by several words in English (e.g., *talo+i+ssa+mme+kin*: noun+plural marker+case ending+possessive suffix+clitic 'also in our houses').[4] Yet the figure is illustrative enough to show that the use of modifying expressions is frequent in the Finnish conversations as well. In other words, the Finns do not seem to be any more direct than the native speakers of English. Rather, the performance of the non-native speakers differs both from the NS(E) conversations and from their own performance in Finnish. Example (3) illustrates the use of certainty modifiers by the native speakers of Finnish:

(3) NS(F)

S1 vaikka tuolla kadulla keskenämme ruvettais englantia puhumaan niin *tuntus vähän* ouvolle

S2 *mä taas oon sitä mieltä että mun mielestä ihan* mä tykkään puhuu nii *niinku* suomalaisten kans *niinku* vaikka tämmösissä tilanteissa ni tykkään puhua englantii ja ruotsii et musta se on kiva *jotenki* keskustella tälleen koska siinä on just se että kaikki ollaan *niinku tavallaan* samassa jamassa siinä

S3 joo

S1 niin on eikä sitä *silleen* kuuntele

S2 eikä *niinku sillä tavalla* välitä *niinku* on *jotenkin* vapaampi ku on saman ikäsiä ja ei *niinku* kiinnitä *sillä tavalla* huomiota puhumiseensa mut heti jos tulee joku opettaja ni mä ainakin muutan heti *niinku jotenkin ehkä vähän* puhettani sillä tavalla *niinku* että valitsen sanani ei kirosanoja *ja näin edespäin*
(...if we started to speak English with each other on the streets, for example, it would *seem a bit* strange
in my opinion I think I *quite* enjoy speaking *you know* with other Finns *like* in these kinds of situations I enjoy speaking English or Swedish *I find* it nice *somehow* to discuss like this because there's the fact that we are all *like in a way* in the same situation yeah
that's right and you don't *sort of* pay attention
and *like in a way* you don't care *you know* you feel *somehow* more free when there's people of the same age *like* you don't *sort of* pay attention to what you're saying but if there's a teacher present at least I change *you know somehow maybe a little* the way I talk *like* choose my words no swear words *and so on*)[5]

The non-native speakers not only use modifiers less than the native speakers of English, they also resort to a smaller variety of modifiers. They favour certain expressions that seem to function as kind of all-purpose modifiers. The most frequently occurring modifiers in the NNS data include, for example, *I think*, *I don't know*, *or something like that*, and *really*. It is, of course, understandable that the non-native speakers have a more restricted vocabulary at their disposal simply due to their non-nativeness. It is interesting from the viewpoint of pragmatic transfer, however, that all the modifiers mentioned above have close semantic equivalents in Finnish, also are used quite often as modifiers in the same speakers' conversations in Finnish (*musta/mun mielestä*, *en mä tiedä*, *tai jotain sellaista*, *tosi*, respectively). This seems to be in accordance with Selinker's

(1992, p. 259) suggestion that translation equivalents form an important learning strategy for foreign language speakers.

Of the modifiers discussed above, *I think* is the most frequently occurring one in the non-native speakers' conversations; there are 65 occurrences altogether. This modifier is very frequent in the NS(E) conversations as well (112 occurrences) but, proportionally, the non-native speakers use it more than the native speakers (13% versus 7% of all certainty modifiers). What is more, there are certain differences in the way the non-native and the native speakers of English use this hedge. The native speakers typically use *I think* together with other hedges, as a part of multiple hedging, in which case it is easy to interpret it as a mitigating device as well because multiple modifiers tend to reinforce each other rather than be in conflict with each other. The non-native speakers, on the other hand, usually use *I think* as the only modifier in the whole utterance, or at least not immediately accompanied by other hedges. They also typically begin their turns with *I think*. Compare the following examples:

(4) NS(E)

S1 yeah *I mean* he is *sort of* he is concerned about architecture I mean I think his views are good
S2 I don't know how they do it, get a flight over to Britain some way *I don't know I mean* these days *I think* it's *quite* difficult to get in now

(5) NNS

S1 *I think* four years is okay *like* in linguistics for us, but I just heard about a guy who is going to finish his studies in psychology he studied two years and is finishing the studies and I *just* have my doubts about him being a good psychologist
S2 how l- how old was he when he started
S1 he was *something* twenty *something*
S2 yeah
S1 not very old
S3 I think the people who don't go to university directly after school they're much more motivated

As the examples indicate, *I think* tends to be in a very prominent position in the learner's utterances. It may in fact be interpreted as bringing the speaker's views into focus rather than attenuating them, especially when used utterance-initially (see Holmes, 1985, p. 34). This can be problematic in encounters with native speakers where non-native speakers may appear as trying to impose their views on others. In other words, the frequent use of *I think* by the non-native speakers seems to be a mixed blessing in terms of negative politeness. It has to be borne in mind, however, that this paper focuses only on the use of lexical certainty modifiers; the non-native speakers might well use some other mitigating strategies along with the use of *I think*, such as tentative tone of voice, for example, which would soften the potential assertory effect of the hedge.

The tendency of the non-native speakers to use certainty modifiers which have Finnish equivalents can be compared to another, contrary finding: in comparison to the native speakers they use quite rarely certain modifiers that are among the most frequently occurring ones in the NS(E) data. These include, for example, *sort of/kind of* (7 occurrences), *you know* (56 occurrences) and *I mean* (25 occurrences). These modifiers are used 83, 173, and 263 times, respectively, in the NS(E) conversations. These modifiers are certainly familiar for the non-native speakers, yet they do not incorporate them into their own speech very often. These expressions do not have so close semantic equivalents in Finnish as the ones discussed earlier, which may be one reason for the learners using them so little. There are functional equivalents in Finnish, though. For example, the use of clitics[6] often has similar functions as the use of implicit modifiers in English, and the hedge *semmonen/tämmönen* (roughly 'such a') is used in much the same ways as *sort of* and *kind of* are used by the native speakers of English. Such functional similarity seems to be more difficult for the learners to perceive than semantic similarity. It is also important to bear in mind that the fact that the non-native speakers resort to these particular expressions more rarely than the native speakers is certainly partly language-teaching induced. That is, the learners have simply not had much opportunity to practice the use of these expressions that are very much part of informal face-to-face encounters in the context of formal language teaching.

Implicit modifiers in general seem to be quite difficult for the non-native speakers, at least if judged by the fact that they make fairly scarce use of them; whereas in the native speaker data, both in English and in Finnish, implicit modifiers constitute the biggest subtype of certainty modifiers. There are 587 occurrences of implicit modifiers in the NS(E) data, 320 in the NS(F) data, and 127 in the NNS data. *I mean* and *you know* are the most usual implicit modifiers in the conversations of native speakers of English (see above); in the Finnish conversations *niinku(n)* with its 256 occurrences is clearly the most frequent one

(literally 'as it were', functionally close to *you know* in English). The frequent use of implicit modifiers by native speakers of Finnish and English is illustrated by the following examples:

(6) NS(E)

S1 it's still a lot of money it's over a over a hundred pounds
S2 yeah yeah but there again *I mean you know*, it's true *I mean* obviously *you know* some people can't afford to pay but they were paying something before surely *I mean you know* [not everybody] no
S1 [no they weren't]

(7) NS(F)

S1 alkaako englanti *niinku silleen*, pikkasen *niinku* menettää näitä asemiaan
S2 mutta *niinku* englannin kieltä pitää varmaan Amerikka *niinku sillai* paljon yllä tai [*sillai* että *niinku*
S1 nii tekee] joo

(I wonder if English will *like you know* start losing its position a bit but *like* America probably keeps *like you know* the English language strong *you know like* that's true yeah)

Implicit modifiers are problematic in the sense that they do not necessarily always function as interpersonally motivated modifiers. They can also be interpreted as pause fillers that occur due to language processing efforts as well as be a part of a speaker's idiosyncratic speech style. It is, however, difficult to tell in which function the speaker really uses implicit modifiers because they can often be interpreted in many ways. This multifunctionality is probably the reason why the non-native speakers use implicit modifiers quite rarely: they are not sure what kind of meanings these modifiers convey and find it, therefore, best to resort to more explicit devices that do not cause so much doubt as to what exactly they mean, such as *I think*, for example (see also Kärkkäinen, 1990, p. 74). In general, the use of implicit modifiers seems to convey certain informality of style and signal the speaker's involvement with the situation as a whole. Therefore, the fact that the non-native speakers use them so little adds to the overall impression that they remain more detached, less involved with each other than the native speakers of either English or Finnish.[7]

This far, the paper has been concerned mainly with the use of hedges and implicit modifiers which are mostly used in downtoning functions. This is because the use of emphatics is much rarer in all sets of data. In both sets of native speaker conversations emphatics constitute only 16% of all certainty modifiers (235 occurrences in the NS(E), and 154 in the NS(F) data). In the NNS conversations emphatics occur only 94 times (18% of all modifiers). It was expected that the speakers would use emphatics as positive politeness markers, signalling mutual solidarity and involvement. For example, they could emphasize agreements and thus signal solidarity with each other. As it turned out, lexical mitigating appears to have a more important interpersonal role in these conversations than lexical emphasizing. It has to be remembered, however, that the conversations are rather artificial in that they take place in a classroom and the participants are aware of the recording taking place. Furthermore, they are acquaintances rather than close friends, and as pointed out earlier in this paper (see endnote 1), speakers may find it risky to emphasize their messages if they are not sure of the opinions of others. It is therefore likely that emphatics would have a more important role in situations where speakers are close friends with each other and where there would thus be more genuine need to show affect explicitly.

Even though emphatics are used considerably less than hedges and implicit modifiers, certain differences emerge between the way the non-native and the native speakers use them. In general, the same applies to emphatics as to other modifiers: the non-native speakers use fewer types of emphatics, tending to favor only certain expressions, notably *very*, *really* and *of course*. It is also worth pointing out that in both sets of native speaker conversations, speakers make use of quite expressive emphatics, often in connection with words that are strong and emotive in themselves. Expressions like *incredibly stupid*, *extremely unfair* or *hirveen ärsyttävää* 'terribly irritating', *kamalan tylsää* 'awfully boring' can easily be found in the speech of native speakers of English and Finnish. The emphatics that the non-native speakers use tend to be more neutral in meaning (*very*, *really*). This brings to mind Thomas's (1983, p. 96) suggestion that foreign-language speakers are often confined to a 'reduced personality' in that they use, and are often expected to use, a rather conventional type of language where extreme markings of personal involvement are avoided. This tendency is apparent in the present data as well, and it further adds to the detached atmosphere of much of the non-native speaker data.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that even though the non-native speakers are otherwise quite fluent speakers of English, they are to a large extent unaware of the significance of certainty modifiers. This has the result that they seem, on the whole, more detached, more matter-of-fact, and less involved with each other and the topic at hand than the native speakers of either English or Finnish. This raises the question of whether learners should be made aware of the significance of certainty modifiers in foreign language teaching. Teaching pragmatic aspects of language is, however, a very delicate matter. This is because pragmatic principles are closely connected to speakers' values and beliefs, to how they view the world and what they consider as appropriate behaviour, and speakers may be reluctant to change such principles when speaking a foreign language (see also Thomas, 1983, p. 99). Littlewood (1983, p. 184) also points out that providing foreign language learners with more and more things to remember every time they use a foreign language may increase communicative anxiety rather than facilitate communication. Yet certain level of consciousness raising seems to be the only way to prevent people from being unintentionally offensive when speaking a foreign language, or more formal or more detached than what they intend to.

It would perhaps be best to start this consciousness raising from learners' L1. Once learners become alerted to the fact that their own language has a lot of material that may seem meaningless at the outset, but that still has important interpersonal functions, maybe it will be easier for them to appreciate that the same applies to foreign languages as well (see also Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991, p. 10). How such consciousness raising can best be achieved is, however, a complicated question; more research is required before definite answers can be given.

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NOTES

[1] The interpersonal functions of mitigating and emphasizing modifiers depend eventually on the context, on the kind of speech act they modify, and on the relationship between the speakers. For example, if speakers do not know each other very well, emphasizing one's expressions may be perceived impolite. As Brown and Levinson (1975, p. 121) point out, expressing strong opinions is risky unless the speaker is sure of the hearer's views.

[2] Propositional certainty is thus in close connection to the concept of *epistemic modality*, which has to do with speakers signalling their degree of commitment to the truth of the propositions in various verbal or non-verbal ways (see e.g. Lyons, 1977,p.797).

[3] Hedges, as understood in this paper, thus involve both hedges as Lakoff (1972) sees them, that is, linguistic devices which add to the fuzziness of linguistic expressions (e.g., *sort of, somewhat*), and markers of epistemic modality (e.g., *probably, might*).

[4] This structural difference also makes it difficult to compare modification strategies across the two languages because modifying functions that are expressed lexically in English can sometimes be realized by morphological means in Finnish, by adding affixes and clitics to word stems, for example. In this paper, however, attention is paid only to lexical modifiers in the NS(F) conversions.

[5] The English translations should be seen as only rough equivalents of the Finnish extracts because it is very difficult to translate pragmatic expressions like certainty modifiers from one language to another. This applies to implicit modifiers in particular.

[6] Especially the clitic-hAn is often used in a modifyiing function. In the following it mitigates the force of the question *Mitähän kello on*? 'What+clitic is time?' It can also signal shared knowledge and thus lessen the imposition of an utterance, corresponding roughly to *you know* in English: *Eihän me voida muutaa mitään* (No+clitic we can change anything) "We can't change anything you know."

[7] Chafe (1985, pp 116-118) discusses the properties of spoken and written language, and he maintains that while written language is usually detached, spoken language shows a variety of manifestations of involvement. Whafe discusses many involvement signals but the use of *you know*, emphatic particles such as *just* and *really*, and expressions like *I think*, and *I mean* are relevant for the presnt approach.

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